Community Health Implementation Strategy / Improvement Plan

Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital

Aspirus Plover Hospital

2026-2029



Acknowledgements

Portage County is home to many dedicated individuals and agencies. Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital and Aspirus Plover Hospital are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with them. This Implementation Strategy reflects many of those collaborations. We look forward to continuing our work together and making a difference in the community's health.

Respectfully,

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Executive Summary

Background

After completing a Community Health Needs Assessment in late 2025 through early 2026, Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital and Aspirus Plover Hospital developed an Implementation Strategy to address local needs.

Process

Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital and Aspirus Plover Hospital are using a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework to structure their plan. Strategy identification criteria included:

- Alignment with the end result (indicator)
- Evidence-base
- Feasibility
- Organizational capacity

Priorities

Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital and Aspirus Plover Hospital applied the Results-Based Accountability model to the following community health issues:

- Behavioral Health
- Social and Economic Drivers of Health
- Childhood Wellness and Childcare

Results

The hospitals will be carrying out the strategies included in this plan over the next three years.

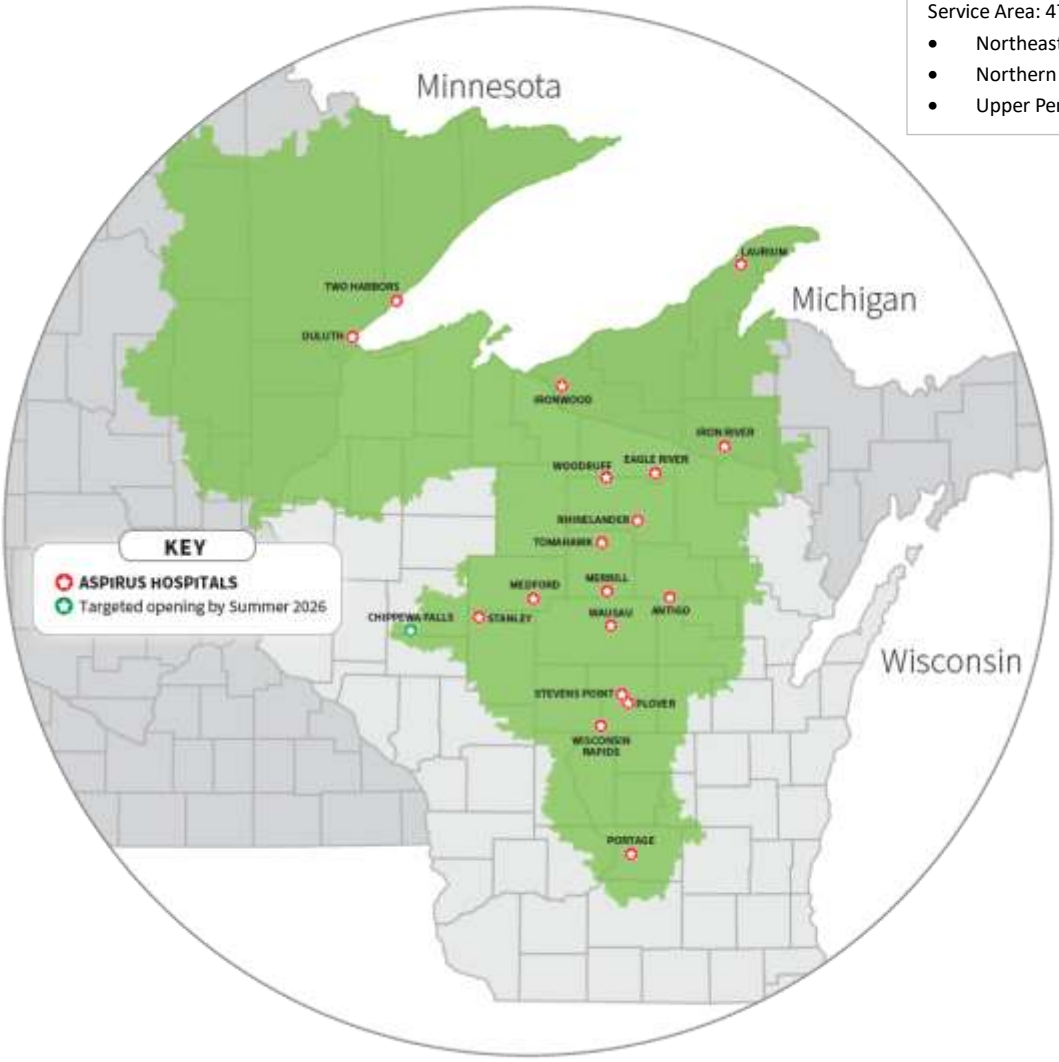
Aspirus Profiles

Aspirus Health

Aspirus Health is a nonprofit, community-directed health system based in Wausau, Wisconsin, serving northeastern Minnesota, northern and central Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The health system operates 19 hospitals and 130 outpatient locations with nearly 14,000 team members, including 1,300 employed physicians and advanced practice clinicians. Learn more at aspirus.org.

Service Area: 47,517 square miles

- Northeastern Minnesota
- Northern and Central Wisconsin
- Upper Peninsula of Michigan



Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital and Aspirus Plover Hospital

Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital & Clinics and Aspirus Plover Hospital are committed to providing local access with high quality health care. They have the opportunity to keep care local and strengthen access to primary and specialty care.

Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital

It is a fully accredited acute-care facility offering expert, personalized care for residents of Stevens Point and Portage County. It offers a broad range of services, including emergency medicine/urgent care, surgery, ICU/CCU, diagnostic radiology, cancer care, rehabilitation, sports medicine, occupational and behavioral health, pathology, and sleep diagnostics.

Aspirus Plover Hospital

It offers ambulatory surgical services, an emergency department, and robust imaging and lab services. The campus also has a large primary and specialty care clinic that provides general wellness visits, acute care, and many specialists for conditions patients may need care for.

About the Implementation Strategy

For Aspirus, the Implementation Strategy (IS), and the corresponding community health needs assessment (CHNA), is one way to live our mission – to heal people, promote health and strengthen communities – and reach our vision – being a catalyst for creating healthy, thriving communities.

Definition / Purpose

A CHNA is "a systematic process involving the community to identify and analyze community health needs and assets in order to prioritize, plan and act upon unmet community needs."[1] The value of the CHNA lies not only in the findings but also in the process itself, which is a powerful avenue for collaboration and potential impact. An Implementation Strategy is "the hospital's plan for addressing community health needs, including health needs prioritized in the CHNA and through other means".[2]

Compliance

The completion of an Implementation Strategy – and a corresponding needs assessment – is a requirement for both hospitals and health departments. For non-profit hospitals, the requirement originated with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). The IRS Code, Section 501(r)(3) outlines the specific requirements, including having the final, approved report posted on a public website. Additionally, CHNA and Implementation Strategy activities are annually reported to the IRS.

In Wisconsin, local health departments are required by Wisconsin State Statute 251.05 to complete a community health assessment and create a plan every five years. The statute indicates specific criteria must be met as part of the process.

[1] Catholic Health Association of the United States, https://www.chausa.org
[2] Catholic Health Association of the United States, *A Guide for Planning & Reporting Community Benefit*

Final Prioritized Needs

Based on community input, health data, and multiple additional criteria, Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital and Aspirus Plover Hospital identified three priority health needs for focused action.

- Behavioral Health (inclusive of mental health and substance use)
- Social and Economic Drivers of Health
- Childhood Wellness and Childcare

Needs Not Selected

Several important community health issues – Access to Affordable, Quality Medical Care; Dental Care; Healthy Aging; Chronic Disease (inclusive of Access to Healthy Food and Lack of Physical Activity) – were not selected for prioritization due to capacity limitations and relatively lower prioritization compared to selected needs. A brief overview of each of the prioritized issues is on the next pages.

General Approach to Implementation

Aspirus is using the results-based accountability (RBA)[3] framework for the Implementation Strategy. In the RBA model, *population-level* results and indicators identify the community-wide well-being that is desired. The *program-level* strategies and performance measures identify what Aspirus and their partners plan to do. That said, improving community well-being will take many resources and substantial policy, system and environmental change.

The next six pages include, for each of the three prioritized needs, a 1-page overview of the need and a 1-page RBA plan. The plans:

- Are described at a general level; plans with more specificity will be created annually.
- Reflect the time period July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2029.
- Reflect intended efforts; circumstances may affect the completion of the efforts.
- May be modified over time.

[3] Clear Impact, https://clearimpact.com/results-based-accountability/

Behavioral Health

Why is it Important?

More than 1 in 5 adults in the United States (59.3 million people in 2022) has a mental illness.[1] Mental health and physical health are closely related, with a correlation between some physical chronic illnesses and poor mental health.[2] Some risk factors include lack of access to education, income, employment and housing; adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); social isolation; drug or alcohol use.[2] Untreated mental health issues can contribute to issues such as family conflicts, problems with drugs or alcohol, weakened immune system, some chronic diseases and more.[3]

Alcohol and drug use are leading causes of preventable deaths.[4] Alcohol is the most frequently used substance in the United States (ages 12+).[4] The number of alcohol-attributed deaths due to excessive alcohol use in the United States increased by 29% in the span of 5 years, from 138K in 2016-2017 to 178K in 2020-2021.[4] Short term risks and long-term impacts of excessive alcohol use include: violence; unintentional injuries (e.g., falls); cancer; high blood pressure; long term memory problems and more.[5]

Sources: (1) National Institute of Mental Health, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness. Accessed on 2/20/2025. (2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/about/index.html. Accessed on 2/20/2025. (3) Mayo Clinic, https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc-20374968. Accessed on 2/20/2025. (4) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/facts-stats/index.html. Accessed on 2/23/2025 and then revisited on 3/29/2026. (5) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/about-alcohol-use/index.html. Accessed on 4/5/2026.

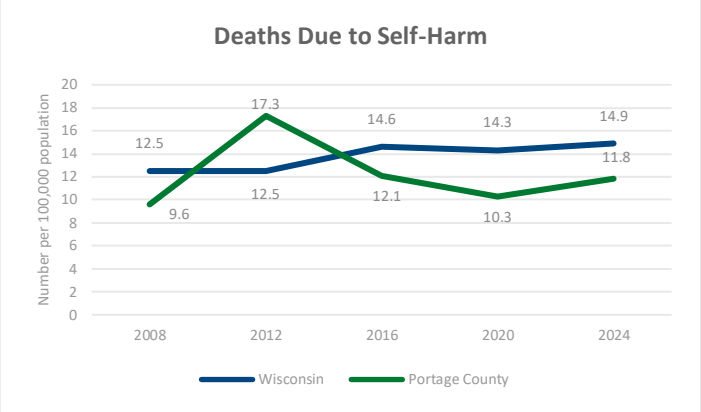
Disparities and Inequities

Disparities and inequities can show where interventions would be most beneficial.

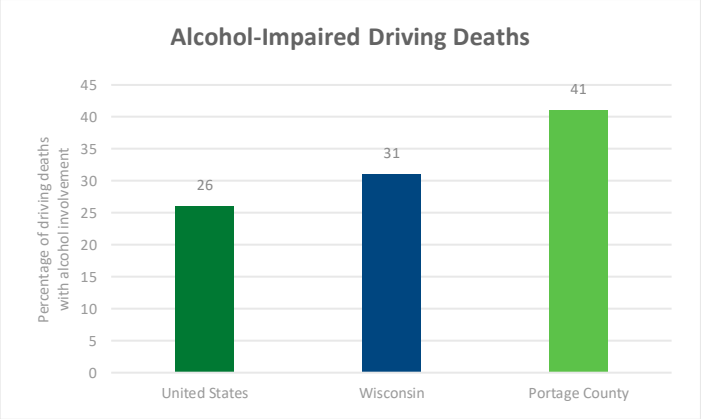
- Individuals in marginalized groups are more likely to have poor mental health.[1]
- The likelihood of depression decreases as education levels increase.[2]
- Depression is higher for women compared to men.[2]
- The suicide rate for men is four times the rate for women.[3]
- Over 55 percent of the students who identified in each of the following groups reported having anxiety: LGB; female; with food insecurity; with low grades; who are Hispanic; who have a multi-racial background.[4]

Sources: (1) Macintyre, A., Ferris, D., Gonçalves, B.et al. What has economics got to do with it? The impact of socioeconomic factors on mental health and the case for collective action. Palgrave Commun4, 10(2018). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0063-2. (2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7224a1.htm. Accessed on 2/21/2025. (3) National Institute of Mental Health, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide#part_2557. Accessed on 2/21/2025. (4) Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey Summary Report (2021), Summary Report: 2023 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Accessed on 3/23/2026.

Data Highlights



Source: Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services, Division of Public Health, Office of Health Informatics. Wisconsin Interactive Statistics on Health (WISH) data query system, https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/wish/index.htm, Injury-Related Mortality Module, accessed 3/22/2026.



Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2025 data release).

Additional Data

- Percentage of adults reporting binge or heavy drinking (age-adjusted) (2022): 27% Portage County; 24% Wisconsin; 19% United States. (Source: 2025 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps)
- Percentage of adults reporting they always, usually or sometimes feel lonely (2022): 34% Portage County; 32% Wisconsin; 33% United States. (Source: 2025 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps)

Community Perceptions & Challenges

Community Conversations highlights include:

- For both mental health and substance use, concerns included: stigma; the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); medications prescribed without addressing the environment; access to care/services. Participants noted an increase in poor youth mental health and in mental health-related 911/EMS calls.

Behavioral Health

Program Accountability		Population Accountability	
Strategy	**Performance Measure -- Quantity, Quality and Effect --**	**Indicator**	**Result**
Improve suicide prevention care practices	• % of patients who screened positive for suicide risk • % of patients who screened positive for risk and a safety plan was completed	Decreased number of individuals who die by suicide. (Baseline: 13 deaths per 100,000 population (2018-2022). Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps)	All community members are mentally well.
Conduct mental health-related classes, trainings and events (e.g., QPR, CALM)	• # of trainings • # of participants • Evaluation results (by training/program)		
Increase awareness / Reduce stigma	• # of suicide prevention education and awareness events led or supported by Aspirus • # of media spots, likes and views for awareness events (e.g., May Mental Health Month and September Suicide Prevention Month) that were led or supported by Aspirus • Raise Your Voice Clubs measures		
Contribute to local coalitions	• Suicide Prevention Coalition successes • AODA Coalition successes • Mental Health and Social Well-being Workgroup successes		
Reduce risk (harm reduction and tertiary prevention)	• % of emergency patients screened for risky alcohol use • # of safe storage devices distributed • # of individuals referred to a recovery coach		
Improve access to resources	• # of 'hits' on the Portage County Peace of Mind website • # of individuals served through CAP Services MH navigation • After-visit summary inclusion of 988 and/or substance use resources		

Collaborative Partners	Aspirus Resources
• Portage County Health and Human Services • Prevent Suicide Portage County (coalition) • Portage County Partnership for Prevention (AODA coalition) • Healthy People Portage County, Mental Health and Social Well-Being workgroup • CAP Services • United Way of Portage County	• Funding through Aspirus Community Benefit dollars • Staff time – coalition participation, event planning and promotion, presentations, resource identification • Space – hosting support groups and meetings • Clinical services and related infrastructure – providing direct care, supporting the FindHelp platform and related resource development

Social and Economic Drivers of Health

Why is it Important?

Social drivers of health are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. SDOH refers to community-level factors. They are sometimes called "social determinants of health." (Adapted from CDC Healthy People 2030) Examples of SDOH include economic stability, access to quality education and health care, and the neighborhood and built environment.

Source: Nearly verbatim from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services website https://www.cms.gov/priorities/innovation/key-concepts/social-drivers-health-and-health-related-social-needs. Accessed on 3/25/2025

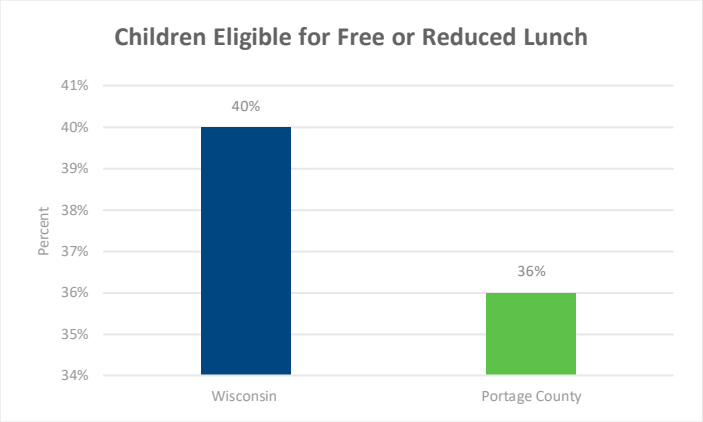
Disparities and Inequities

Disparities and inequities can show where interventions would be most beneficial.

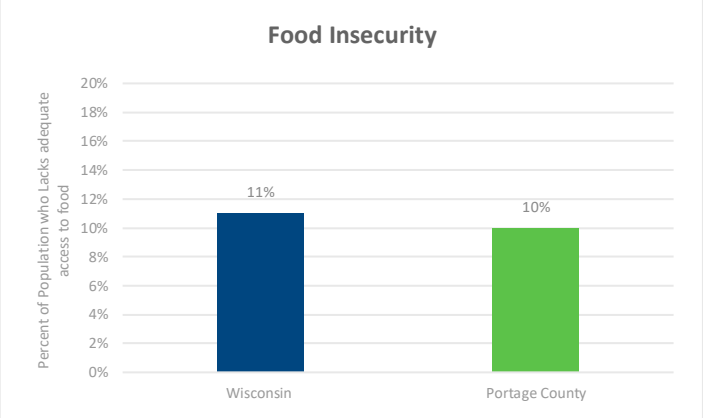
- Unmet social needs, environmental factors, and barriers to accessing health care contribute to worse health outcomes for people with lower incomes. For example, people with limited finances may have more difficulty obtaining health insurance or paying for expensive procedures and medications. In addition, neighborhood factors, such as limited access to healthy foods and higher instances of violence, can affect health by influencing health behaviors and stress.
- Across the lifespan, residents of impoverished communities are at increased risk for mental illness, chronic disease, higher mortality, and lower life expectancy.
- Children make up the largest age group of those experiencing poverty. Childhood poverty is associated with developmental delays, toxic stress, chronic illness, and nutritional deficits. Individuals who experience childhood poverty are more likely to experience poverty into adulthood, which contributes to generational cycles of poverty. In addition to lasting effects of childhood poverty, adults living in poverty are at a higher risk of adverse health effects from obesity, smoking, substance use, and chronic stress.

Source: Verbatim from Healthy People 2030 website https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/poverty. Accessed on 3/25/2025.

Data Highlights



Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2025 data release).



Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2025 data release).

Additional Data

- In Wisconsin, between 2017 and 2022, the median home value increased 53.3% and the median income increased by 19.7%. (Source: Wisconsin Policy Forum, https://wispolicyforum.org/research/home-prices-outpace-incomes/)

Community Perceptions & Challenges

Community Conversations highlights include:

- General: cost of living is outpacing income; property taxes.
- Healthcare-related: being uninsured or underinsured; difficulty understanding how to access health insurance, healthcare and financial systems; affordability of healthcare; insurance doesn't cover everything.
- Housing: HUD and other funding is shifting; high housing costs ("out of control" and no rent caps); barriers to housing/rental based on criminal history; questionable landlord practices; college housing; lack of diverse housing options.

Social and Economic Drivers of Health

Program Accountability		Population Accountability	
Strategy	**Performance Measures -- Quantity, Quality and Effect --**	**Indicator**	**Results**
Develop a consistent social drivers of health (SDOH) screening workflow	• FindHelp integration in Epic • % of patients screened • % of closed loop referrals • # of resources being shared through the after-visit summary • # of staff/user trainings	Increased percentage of patients who shift from high risk to medium/low risk (using the social drivers of health (SDOH) screening tool)	All community members have their basic needs met
Strengthen FindHelp	• # of scheduled 'refreshes' • # of new resources • # of community partner trainings / workshops		
Develop a Community Paramedic Program	• # of patients served • # of patients who were connected with resources • Examples of success		
Support housing resources	• Average number of participants in the Portage County Affordable Housing Coalition meetings • Progress on Housing Coalition workgroup workplans • Qualitative reflections on changes as a function of the coalition		
Provide food resources	• Value of food gleaned and given to the Salvation Army • # of Fruit and Vegetable Prescription (FVRx) vouchers redeemed • $$ farmers market coupons • Exploration of Aspirus on-site food pantry or related resource		

Collaborative Partners	Aspirus Resources
• Portage County Health and Human Services • Stevens Point Fire Department • Healthy People Portage County, Building a Safe and Thriving Community workgroup • Portage County Affordable Housing Coalition • Local farmers market and Co-op	• Funding through Aspirus Community Benefit dollars • Staff time – coalition participation, event planning and promotion, presentations, resource identification • Space – hosting support groups and meetings • Clinical services and related infrastructure – providing direct care, supporting the FindHelp platform and related resource development

Childhood Wellness and Childcare

Why is it Important?

Early childhood, particularly the first 5 years of life, impacts long-term social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Healthy development in early childhood helps prepare children for the educational experiences of kindergarten and beyond. Early childhood development and education opportunities are affected by various environmental and social factors, including early life stress, socioeconomic status, relationships with parents and caregivers, and access to early education programs.

Early life stress and adverse events can have a lasting impact on the mental and physical health of children. Specifically, early life stress can contribute to developmental delays and poor health outcomes in the future. Stressors such as physical abuse, family instability, unsafe neighborhoods, and poverty can cause children to have inadequate coping skills, difficulty regulating emotions, and reduced social functioning compared to other children their age.

Source: Nearly verbatim from Healthy People 2030 – Early Childhood Development and Education

Disparities and Inequities

Poverty has been shown to negatively influence the academic achievement of young children. Research shows that, in their later years, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to repeat grades and drop out of high school.

Exposure to environmental hazards, such as lead in the home, can negatively affect a child's health and cause cognitive developmental delays. Research shows that lead exposure disproportionally affects children from racial/ethnic minority and low-income households and can adversely affect their readiness for school.

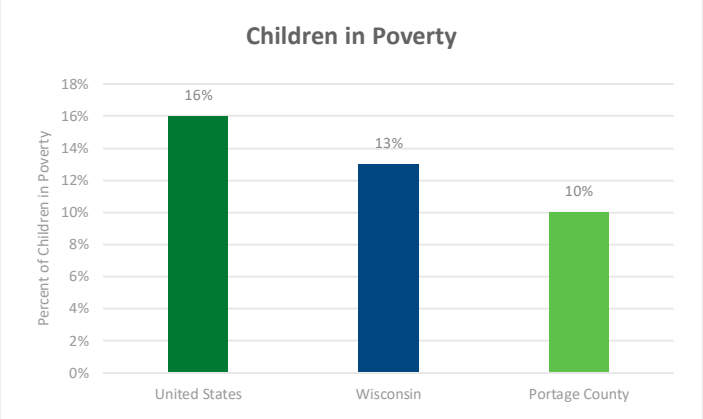
Source: Nearly verbatim from Healthy People 2030 – Early Childhood Development and Education

Community Perceptions & Challenges

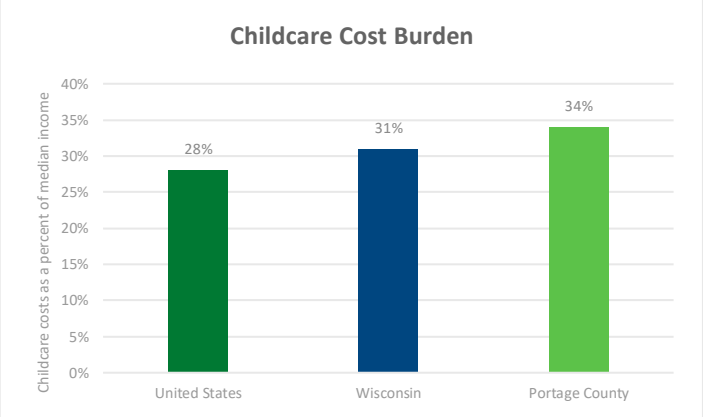
Community Conversations highlights include:

- Childcare: cost is not affordable to many; some people need the childcare at times when it is not offered; childcare workers are underpaid; waitlists are long.
- Childhood wellbeing: worsening youth mental health; parents do not know how to access MH support; diagnoses take time; families are not listened to by providers; stigma; in-network vs out-of-network MH providers; appointment delays.

Data Highlights



Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2025 data release).



Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (2025 data release).

Additional Data

- Over 50% of Portage County high school students experienced anxiety; 33% experienced depression; 23% self-harmed; 17% considered suicide. (Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2023)
- Number of child abuse and neglect reports per 1000 children (2024): 24.2 Portage County; 24.9 Wisconsin. (Source: The Annie E Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center)

Childhood Wellness and Childcare

Program Accountability		Population Accountability	
Strategy	**Performance Measures -- Quantity, Quality and Effect --**	**Indicator**	**Results**
Engage in the County Childcare Collaborative	• Aspirus participation in the Collaborative	Maintain the current number of regulated childcare slots (Baseline: 1821. Source: Childcaring, August 2026) Increase the percentage of Portage County Middle School students who feel they belong at school (Baseline: 70%. Source: 2025 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS))	All children have equal opportunities for well-being
Conduct classes and support programs (e.g., new moms class)	• # of participants in New Moms Class • # of new parents who breastfeed • # of breastfeeding-friendly workplaces		
Increase youth opportunities for positive mental health	• # of participants in Boys and Girls Club summer SEL programming • % of SEL-participating youth with improved social-emotional competencies (pre- and post-test) • # of Raise Your Voice Club participants		

Collaborative Partners	Aspirus Resources
• Portage County Health and Human Services • Portage County Breastfeeding Coalition • Boys and Girls Club of Portage County • Healthy People Portage County, Equitable Opportunity to Be Healthy workgroup • CAP Services	• Funding through Aspirus Community Benefit dollars • Staff time – coalition participation, event planning and promotion, presentations, resource identification • Space – hosting support groups and meetings • Clinical services and related infrastructure – providing direct care, supporting the FindHelp platform and related resource development

System Priorities and Health Equity

Aspirus' community health efforts include the above efforts along with system strategies and growing attention to health equity.

System Priorities

In addition to addressing locally-identified community health priorities, Aspirus identifies and addresses system-level priorities. These system-level priorities emerge through a process that considers: the shared priorities of the 19 Aspirus hospitals; internal momentum; existing effective strategies; funding opportunities.

For 2026-2029, Aspirus' system-level priorities are: behavioral health; food navigation; healthcare access and navigation. When there is overlap between locally-identified and system-identified priority areas, Aspirus strategies are part of the Implementation Strategy/Plan. When system-identified priorities are not part of a local Strategy/Plan, some Aspirus system strategies may still be implemented locally.

Health Equity

Research shows that social and economic factors (social drivers) are significant 'upstream' contributors to individuals' and communities' health outcomes. Social and economic conditions influence disease risk, access to care, and health outcomes long before individuals enter the healthcare system.

In clinical settings, Aspirus hospitals and clinics are gathering social drivers of health data as a way to understand how to tailor care to better meet the unique needs of each patient, leading to improved health equity and better health outcomes. Using aggregated patient-level social drivers' data can assist in understanding the root causes of complex health issues to improve access to preventative and chronic care services. Linking patient level SDOH data and community level data can provide stronger clinical-community linkages to help connect healthcare providers, community organizations and public health agencies.

Aspirus implements The Joint Commission Elements of Performance (NPG.04.01.01). This process includes: assessing patients' health-related social needs; providing information about community resources; identifying disparities, and; implementing strategies to improve disparities.

Approval by the Hospital Board

The Implementation Strategy report was reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors for:

- Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital on October 22, 2026.
- Aspirus Plover Hospital on October 21, 2026.

Conclusion

Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital and Aspirus Plover Hospital are proud to share this plan for community health improvement.

Appendix: Strategies by Hospital

The tables below describe which strategies are planned for which hospitals.

Behavioral Health	Stevens Point Hospital	Plover Hospital
Improve suicide prevention care practices	X	X
Conduct mental health-related classes, trainings and events (e.g., QPR, CALM)	X	X
Increase awareness / Reduce stigma	X	X
Contribute to local coalitions	X	X
Reduce risk (harm reduction and tertiary prevention)	X	X
Improve access to resources	X	X

Social Drivers of Health	Stevens Point Hospital	Plover Hospital
Develop a consistent SDOH workflow to identify and refer to resources and close the loop	X	X
Strengthen FindHelp	X	X
Develop a Community Paramedic Program	X	--
Support housing resources	X	X
Provide food resources	X	--

Childhood Wellness and Childcare	Stevens Point Hospital	Plover Hospital
Engage in the County Childcare Collaborative	X	X
Conduct classes and support programs (e.g., new moms class)	X	--
Increase youth opportunities for positive mental health	X	X

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